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ABSTRACT

The tradition of independent study is traced from classical antiquity to the 20th century. Particular attention is given to the example of such persons as Descartes, Rousseau, Goethe, and Franklin, and to the role of encyclopedias, libraries, and correspondence study in furthering self-education. Nine references are included. (LY)

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AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ADULT SELF-LEARNER

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We are gathered here from many provinces and states in order to, for the next two days, explore the make-up of the adult as a self-learner, examine ways and means of developing his study skills and assisting him in his life-long pursuit of learning, and consider and discuss the place of organized independent study in the system of integrated, life-long education.

Ours are two young countries in the history of this world, and in our enthusiasm we sometimes forget to look back at the past where we would often discover roots, experiments and even successful prototypes of our newly discovered theories, methods and techniques, and institutions. It is my hope to provide at the outset of this Institute a brief and rather broad sweep through the history of at least the western civilization, touching here and there on the theory and practice of self-education since antiquity, and sketching briefly the ways and means of support designed to assist the self-learning adult. I hope this will give us a historical perspective in our discussion of the significant present, and the challenging future of independent study.

One can say, generally, that up to the fairly recent wide-spread and readily available schooling for everybody, self-education was the prime way for man to cope with the world around him. The universal man of the renaissance, the highly skilled guild craftsman of the baroque period, are excellent examples of the self-learning adult. With the introduction of free compulsory education for children, following the industrial revolution, many educators have forgotten the need of the adult to continue on learning, although the working man struggling for his place in the industrial society and the North American self-made man provide us with ample examples of the self-educated adult. In our own time we seem to have gone the full circle, as in spite of the extended schooling period for our children and youth we have to rely increasingly on the adult's ability to engage in a life-long self-learning process. However, his ability may not be developed and used to the full, and his

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learning will not be efficient, unless we can equip him with the necessary tools and skills and give him the support and organizational assistance he needs.

If we search for support for the claim of man's ability as a self-learner, we can find it already with the Greek philosophers. Socrates spoke about the wise as those who have mastered self-control, and declared himself as a self-learner who is not ashamed to learn from everyone around him. Plato saw as the ultimate goal of education of young the ability of the adult for self-education. Aristotle talks about the principle of self-realization, the entelechy, a potentiality for wisdom in each living being which can be developed both through self-education and through the help of a teacher. The Roman statesman Seneca extolled planned, purposeful self-education, which he exemplified through his own life. Oppenheim points out that, according to Seneca, all education through others must ultimately aim at inculcating the ability for self-education, and that this ability needs frequent re-charging and guidance from outside the individual.

Centuries later, Erasmus of Rotterdam outlined in his Study of Christian Philosophy, published in 1516, didactical guidelines of self-education. Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher, almost three centuries later presented what he termed "pragmatical" assistance for self-education of adults in his Anthropology. The educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi declared "I have to raise myself, through my own effort, to the degree of perfection made possible by my own nature," and the historian Edward Gibbon wrote in his autobiography "Every man who rises above the common level has received two educations: the first from his teachers; the second, more personal and important, from himself." But the most eloquent affirmation of self-education, both in his writing and through his own life, is presented by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In his novel Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahren Goethe illustrates forcibly his philosophical concept of the forever striving, forever learning man. In the drama Dr. Faust, who is Goethe's prototype of the modern man, the study-room is the cell of self-education. Goethe's call for the personal responsibility for man's self-education was carried on in the life and work of the writers and philosophers of the storm and stress and of the following romantic period, and influenced German intellectuals up to recent times.

Are we to look for examples of adult self-learners, we can again start with antiquity. Alexander the Great is known to have had the works of Homer with him in all his travels and Caesar included in his daily work-plan time for writing and study. Marcus Aurelius is an excellent example of a continuing self-learner. Alfred the Great, the English medieval king, is said to have devoted every minute that he could spare from his duties as a ruler to the improvement of his mind.

In the sixteenth century, Ignatius of Loyola, thirty-three years old, decided to educate himself through the means of exercises which he himself prescribed. His Spiritual Exercises became the pedagogical handbook of the teaching order of the Jesuits, which he founded. Rene Descartes, about one hundred years later, described in his Discourse on Method how he early abandoned his teachers and the study of letters, and sought his education in experience and observation of himself and the world around him, and how he through reflection on his experience improved himself. In the next century, Jean Jacques Rousseau acquired his education largely through self-study, and the German writer Christoph Martin Wieland demonstrated in his autobiographical novel Agathon the dictum of the Enlightenment that the adult can and should be engaged in a process of self-education. At about the same time, Johann Gottfried Herder outlined his own program of self-education in his Reisejournal.

On this continent, Benjamin Franklin can be seen as one of the early leaders in self-education. His Autobiography is not only a gospel of the materially successful self-made man; it also points out the way to self-education through reading and discussion. Another American, Henry David Thoreau, upheld the right of the individual to self-culture, and demanded the freedom for every man to follow his unique style of life. In his two-year experiment at the Walden pond he tried to affirm his faith in "the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavour." The success story of Thomas Alva Edison, who with only three months of public school as a child rose to become one of the most prolific inventors and who was engaged in learning and discovery almost to his death, is perhaps the best known American example of the self-educated and self-learning adult.

Among Europeans, the two outstanding modern examples of self-educated adults are the young Russian novelist Maksim Gorki, who had to earn his living since his eighth year and acquired most of his education on his own as he worked and travelled throughout Russia, and the Nobel prize winner for literature Knut Hamsun, who had to learn through his restless wandering in Europe and the United States.

If we were to reflect about all these men who preached and lived self-education, we would note that, with the fairly recent exceptions, they were not common men; they were rulers, philosophers, and writers. Furthermore, most of them had a good basis of education to start with and were highly motivated to continue the process of life-long self-education. During the last one hundred and fifty years their drive for self-education has been emulated by the elite of the working class. However, effective self-education involving great numbers of adults was not possible without motivation and assistance from outside. We shall now turn to a review of the development of this assistance from the early times to the independent study of our own days.

Instructive letters can be considered as the forerunners of formal correspondence instruction. Graff in his interesting article on the development of correspondence study traced instructive letters back to the biblical times and to early Greek and Roman history. These letters play an important role in the Roman Catholic Church to this day.

The public debates in the Roman Republic were a school of politics and public speaking for the adult self-learner by means of observation and active participation. Later on, in the middle ages, the adult learned to appreciate art and music in the local church or cathedral, was influenced by the morality plays, and acquired new learning through participation in the crusades.

The universal man of the Italian renaissance in his life-long search of learning is the prime example of the adult self-learner. In northern Europe and in England, by mid-sixteenth century, as Kelly points out, the "new humanist ideal of the virtuous and cultivated gentleman, skilled in the arts of self-government, in languages..., in sciences..., and in music and physical exercises" replaced the old medieval courtier. The Reformation in central and northern Europe brought about more stress on the individual, as did the

renaissance in the south. Reading and study of the Bible in the vernacular by families and individuals in towns and villages, and the emerging protestant ethic provided new motivation for the self-learning adult. The ravages of the Thirty Year War slowed down this process in central Europe, but even the economic ruin and the decimation of population resulting from the war, could not stop this process completely.

Meanwhile, in England, already during the late Tudor period a new significant development took place in the appearance of an increasing number of manuals and archtypes of textbooks, aimed primarily at the working man. Kelly quotes from one of the first of such manuals, Edmund Coote's Englische Scholemaister, published in 1596, that "it was designed not only for the teacher, but also for 'the unskillful, which desire to make use of it, for their owne private benefit,'" and draws the conclusion that the manual "must be reckoned as one of the earliest manuals for self-education." Other early elementary textbooks from this period include a mathematics textbook by Robert Recorde, and a manual on geometry and astronomy for the craftsmen by Leonard Digges.

An English institution which blossomed in the second half of the seventeenth century and provided motivation and opportunity for the adult self-learner was the coffee house, which at its height before the Revolution, especially in London, was an important intellectual centre where the political, religious, literary and scientific ideas of the day were discussed.

From the earliest times, the importance of libraries for self-education cannot be overstressed. But it is especially the growth of parrish, subscription and later on public libraries, which provided an opportunity and considerably aided the self-learning adult. The first European public library, the Vatican Library, was established in the 15th century. The first public library in the United States was opened in Boston as early as 1653, but it took until 1833 to establish the first tax supported public library at Peterborough in New Hampshire. In spite of the highly developed literary tradition in Germany, the first German public library was founded in Berlin first in 1850, on the initiative of Friedrich von Raumer who was inspired by American public libraries on his visit to the United States in 1841.

The rapid development of the public libraries in Germany, which was actively supported by the book publishers, had called forth an interesting secondary development in the publication of inexpensive paper editions of high literary and scholarly level, published in considerable number of copies. The most successful and sustained effort in this line is the Universalbibliothek founded in 1867 by Heinrich Reclam. This innovation in the publishing business spread to other European countries and blossomed between the two world wars. It was not until after the Second World War that this important tool of self-education took a significant foothold in England in the form of the Penguin books (and their cousins Pelicans, Puffins etc.) which by now have achieved world-wide fame and distribution. The American publishers were very slow in accepting paperback books and held off until the late 1950's, but then they too were swept up into the most significant development in book publishing since the invention of the Guthenberg press. Once the paperback was accepted, American expertise in marketing and mass distribution made it available at newspaperstands, bus and train stations, drugstores and grocery stores, places frequented by adults who would not venture into a book store.

In order to have a look at another tool of the self-learning adult, we have to return to the Romans. Varro's Of School Studies in Nine Books is acclaimed as one of the earliest archtypes of encyclopedias. It was followed by the Natural History of Pliny the Elder and by Seneca's Natural Questions. The modern type encyclopedia, with alphabetical arrangement and bibliographies attached to the articles, is said to have been established by John Harris in his Lexicon technicum, published in England in 1704. Ephraim Chambers published in 1728 his Cyclopedia, not to be confused with the Chamber's Encyclopedia which was published in the first edition between 1859-68. The first edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica appeared in only three volumes in 1771 at Edinburgh. The renowned Encyclopedia of the French encyclopedists under the leadership of Diderot was not completed until 1772; in the spirit of the Enlightenment it was aimed at enlightening the populace and was a prime tool of self-education. The Konversationslexikon, published in the first edition in 1808 by Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus, is still today one of the best encyclopedias in the German language. On this continent, the first noteworthy American encyclopedia, the Encyclopedia Americana, edited by Francis Lieber, was published in 13 volumes between 1829-33.

However, it is not only through books that the self-learning adult can progress. Since the ancient times, travel, combined with careful observation, was an important educational experience. I have already mentioned the educational influence of the crusades. The wandering scholars of the middle ages and the wandering journeymen craftsmen at the height of the guild system are good examples of adults in search of new learning. Later on, purposeful and planned travel of the European intellectuals, which especially in the case of the Russian aristocracy and intelligentsia must not be underestimated, was of considerable educational importance, as was the "wandering into the wide world" of the young men from the villages and journeymen from small provincial towns during the nineteenth century. The trend to mass travel, developed since the Second World War, has important implications for us as adult educators, but seems to receive only limited attention.

In our travel through time and space in search of the self-learning adult we have finally arrived at the kind of assistance we are most familiar with, correspondence study. According to Noffsinger, the year 1840 marks the beginning of modern correspondence instruction, as in that year Isaac Pitman in England offered for the first time his shorthand course to distant pupils via the new penny post. Ruskin College had a correspondence department since its foundation, and the University of London began its correspondence courses in 1887. In continental Europe, the first and famous correspondence school was established in Berlin in 1856 by Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt. The establishment of the Rustinches Fernlehrinstitut, also in Berlin, followed in 1894. In Sweden, Hans Hermod established at Malmö the new well known Hermods National Korespondance Institut. In Russia, correspondence study had its beginnings in the late nineteenth century and the first public demand for organized correspondence courses preparing for higher education was voiced at a conference in 1908. After the turn of the century, home study schools spread throughout Europe and now correspondence education, education-at-a-distance, plays an important role in the education of adults, especially in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries.

In the United States a Society to Encourage Studies at Home was founded by Anna Elliot Ticknor at Boston in 1873. However, the school was short-lived and did not survive past the death of its founder. The Illinois Wesleyan University was the first institution to start, in 1874 (1873?) a successful correspondence study leading to bachelors degrees and planned eventually to lead to masters and doctorate degrees. The successful program was forced to close down in 1910 as other universities refused to recognize degrees granted entirely on the basis of correspondence study. A short-lived experiment was the Correspondence University, founded at Ithaca, New York, in 1883 by a group of thirty-two professors from a wide variety of colleges and universities. In spite of its name and ambitions the school had no state charter and no authority to grant degrees.

The correspondence lessons, started in 1881 by William Rainey Harper in response to requests by students in his Hebrew class at the Chautauqua School of Languages, set in motion a significant chain reaction. The experiment proved so successful that the new method was incorporated into the Chautauqua movement. Harper's experience led him to write an insightful analysis of the correspondence method and its early development in the United States, quoted at length by John H. Vincent in The Chautauqua Movement, published in 1886. When Harper went to the University of Chicago in 1892 to be its first president, he had established correspondence study as one of the important divisions in the extension department, which was one of the five main organizational units of the university. The Chicago University Home Study Division operated for 72 years until it was closed down in 1964. In spite of considerable controversy about the efficacy of university correspondence teaching, some other universities and colleges followed the lead of Chicago. One of the most important of these was the University of Wisconsin, which opened a correspondence teaching department in 1906. Between 1906 and 1910 seven additional universities established correspondence programs and in 1913 the University of California at Berkeley set up a program which by 1964 grew to be considered the largest university-based correspondence operation in the United States.

However, universities were not the only ones to venture into home study. Thomas J. Foster, editor of the Mining Herald in Pennsylvania, prompted by the enactment of the state mine safety law, started to publish in 1886 a question-and-answer column on problems of mine safety. Later, he also published pamphlets preparing for the state examination. The interest generated by his column and pamphlets led him to the establishment of a correspondence course, which eventually led to the foundation of the first private correspondence school in the United States, the International Correspondence Schools (ICS). Foster's success brought other private ventures into the field of home study.

Since the turn of the century, professional and trade associations, business and industry, labour unions, and government agencies entered the field with varying degrees of success. The one government agency which deserves to be mentioned in this connection is the Army Institute, established in 1941 and extended in 1943 to cover all the armed services and reconstituted as the U.S. Armed Forces Institute (USAFI).

On the international scene, it is worth mentioning that the International Council on Correspondence Education was organized in 1938 in Victoria, the capital of this Province. The European Council for Education by correspondence, founded at Leiden in the Netherlands in 1962, seems to be an effective organization for the advancement and the quality of correspondence schools in Western Europe.

Since the last war, and particularly in the 1960's, new media, in addition to books and correspondence lessons, increasingly have come into use and the concept is rapidly changing from correspondence study to independent study. Some exciting experiments are going on in Japan, England, Europe and on this continent. I am certain that we will hear about many of the new ideas and experiments from professor Wedemeyer, who has been at the initiating stage of many of them, including the exciting new Open University in England.

Independent study, Fernstudium, samoobrazovanje, is well developed especially in Eastern Europe. One of the stated aims of the adult education system in Yugoslavia is to equip the adult learner with all the attitudes and skills he needs for independent study up to the utopian vision where the adult educator will literally do himself out of work. Obviously this is hardly possible to achieve effectively in the affective, and it would be difficult in the motor-skills domains, while it has to be carefully considered in the cognitive doman, but it is worth noting and examining. The concept of education permanente is slowly gaining ground. Life-long integrated learning can succeed only if we mobilize the human ability to learn throughout life in a systematic way. Independent study, and the self-learning adult, will have to form a considerable part of this integrated, life-long system of education. Thank you.

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